

Sermon for 29.1.17

In the gospel today we hear Jesus deliver what is commonly referred to as The Sermon on the Mount.

The sermon is the first of five discourses in Matthews gospel and takes place relatively early in Jesus Ministry after he has been baptized by John the Baptist and after he began preaching and healing in Galilee.

Jesus, like Moses, ascends a mountain to deliver his teaching.

The sermon is a collection of sayings known as the Beatitudes which are a literary form that describe a person whose way of life reflects God's way in the world.

There are numerous Beatitudes in the Old Testament particularly in the Psalms.

For instance Psalm 1 begins, *Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked.... But their delight is in the law of the Lord*, and in Psalm 112, *Happy are those who fear the lord, who greatly delight in his commandments*.

Hence the form was familiar to both Jesus and the Hebrew community of the day.

At the time Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount his fame had spread like wildfire, and he attracted great crowds. So on this day there was a huge gathering that had come to hear him.

The beatitudes are Jesus' opening sentences in the sermon, and in which he details the way of God in human terms. A blue print if you like of how to live the kingdom here on earth.

The Sermon takes for granted, that attainment of entrance to the kingdom of God is the supreme goal of life, and that there is no serious alternative to this goal.

There are 8 beatitudes in the form of exclamations about the blessed life in God.

There are many definitions offered in theological reference books. The following is one of them taken from a well-known and respected commentary:

"The poor in spirit" relates to openness to God and one is blessed by it because only in this state is it possible to receive anything.

Those who mourn speaks of the repentant sinner and it is they who *receive comfort*.

The Meek describes not the weak, but rather strength that is surrendered to God in a new birth experience.

To hunger and thirst after righteousness signifies the strong desire to become more Christlike.

The merciful shows an attitude of forgiveness.

The pure in heart strive daily for clean living.

The peacemakers exert a calming influence in the storms of life.

The ones which are persecuted denotes steadfast faithfulness under all kinds of duress. Each beatitude carries with it a strong promise of ultimate good for those who develop the blessed life.

As we can deduct from these definitions blessedness is understood in terms of inner sanctity.

It is not something that can be attained by any pursuit of happiness; nor by any kind of social reconstruction from a political program.

Jesus is not represented as an advocate of social and economic reform, or political change.

These may well be consequences of the blessed way, but they are not the focus of the beatitudes. Jesus does not call people to enlist in a crusade – he calls them to repentance.

The satisfactions promised to the blessed are not of their achieving; they are the gift of God.

The beatitudes exclaim a deep wisdom about life in God and with each other.

They speak of an inner attitude of receptivity and openness to God.

They speak of a deep consciousness of the world's suffering and of our own sin. And an openness to God's compassion and comfort.

They speak of a meekness, a gentleness that is no longer prone to the compulsions of ego.

A rightness with God in such a way that our anchor is in him.

They speak of mercy and receiving mercy.

Of a singleness of heart with one desire to live in the righteousness of God.

Of peacemakers who do not wield the sword of division but know inner peace that flows out into the world.

Of a willingness to stand firm and face opposition for the sake of oneness in Him.

The new way of the kingdom that Jesus inaugurates introduces a distinctive lifestyle with radically different values and cannot be separated from him but which come to fruition in relationship with him.

The entire sermon is simply about being detached enough from what we are attached to.

It is about being able to live out what it takes to show the kind of God that God is.

To live in tune with God's freedom, which is always a freedom that makes other people free and gives them joy in the reality, the truth that is God's life.

The Lord be with you.

